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From the Pastor's Desk

Gaining Victory! Romans 8:28

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God to those who are the called according to His purpose."

There is no victory without battle. Battle is the normal state of affairs for the believer. The devil won't just walk away from hard-earned territory. When the Word of God comes into our life, it will try us. It will test us. It will see what our reactions are to the battles. It will see if we are established in the Word and the revelation God has for us. Before Abraham became the father of a great nation, God tried him. Jacob was tried by Laban when he wanted to marry Rachel. Jesus was tried in the desert before His ministry began. Every blessing, just like a coin, has two sides. Often we think that God's blessings protect us from tests. But with each blessing come temptations, tests and opposite. As soon as God makes you stronger, you might as well brace yourself for the next wave of tests and battles. The devil will find out about your blessing and will make sure that your blessing becomes your headache. But the Bible says: *And we know that all things work together for good to those*

who love God to those who are the called according to His purpose." So it is really important to remember that we are attacked not because God dislikes us, but because the devil doesn't like God blessing us. That is why the time of battle like the time of persecution is the time to thank and praise God! It is time to see God's blessing behind our struggles. It is time to get strengthened in faith and know that the blessings of God are stronger than the devil's attacks. *"Greater is He who is in us that he who is in the world."* 1 John 4:4. If the devil starts putting obstacles in your life, that means God has a special plan of blessing for you. The devil's attacks are a proof of his powerlessness. If you realize this, it will be easier for you to fight the battles of life. There is no way to greatness without passing through trials by fire. Remember that as soon as Pharaoh saw that the Israelites were multiplying, the blessing turned to the other side of the coin. He began to persecute them. So when you are thrust into battle, don't complain, but remember that everything works together for good for those who love God. Many believers wander in the wilderness instead of going on to their promise land. They are afraid of hardship and fail to put their trust in God. When the Israelite spies saw the people living in the Promised Land, they were fooled by their size and called them giants. In the same way there are giants on your way to claiming

your promise land. There are problems, hardships, resistance and persecution. So to overcome you must put your strength in God and not yourself. What is required is to have the courage and spirit of a warrior, to conqueror, to take possession of your Canaan land. The Church is not for entertaining believers, but it is a place to raise up world changers and history makers!

Enjoy The Journey
Pastor Clayton

Sermon and Service Outline December 2009

December 6

AM Service: "Follow The Star That Illuminates Our Darkness!"
Text: Matthew 2:9 Pastor Clayton

PM Service: The Truth Project

December 13

AM Service: "Follow The Star That Produces Great Joy!"
Text: Matthew 2:10 Pastor Clayton

PM Service: Christmas Dinner and Children's Christmas Program
Starting at 5:00 PM

December 20 CHRIST BIRTHDAY OFFERING!

AM Service: "Follow The Star That Inspires Extravagant Worship!"
Text: Matthew 2:11 Pastor Clayton

December 27

AM Service: "Changing The Heart!"
Text: 2 Cor. 5:17-21 Pastor Clayton

PM Service: The Truth Project

Joseph's Letter Home a Christmas Story

Dear Mom,

We're still in Bethlehem--Mary and I and little Jesus.

There were lots of things I couldn't talk to you about last summer. You wouldn't have believed me then, but maybe I can tell you now. I hope you can understand.

You know, Mom, I've always loved Mary. You and dad used to tease me about her when she was still a girl. She and her brothers used to play on our street. Our families got together for supper. But the hardest day of my life came scarcely a year ago when I was twenty and she only fifteen. You remember that day, don't you?

The trouble started after we were betrothed and signed the marriage agreement at our engagement. That same spring Mary had left abruptly to visit her old cousin Elizabeth in Judea. She was gone three whole months. After she got back, people started wondering out loud if she were pregnant.

It was cloudy the day when I finally confronted her with the gossip. "Mary," I asked at last, "are you going to have a baby?"

Her clear brown eyes met mine. She nodded.

I didn't know what to say. "Who?" I finally stammered.

Mom, Mary and I had never acted improperly--even after we were betrothed.

Mary looked down. "Joseph," she said. "There's no way I can explain. You couldn't understand. But I want you to know I've never cared for anyone but you." She got up, gently took my hands in hers, kissed each of them as if it were the last time she would ever do that again, and then turned towards home. She must have been dying inside. I know I was.

The rest of the day I stumbled through my chores. It's a wonder I didn't hurt myself in the woodshop. At first I was angry and pounded out my frustrations on the doorframe I was making. My thoughts whirled so fast I could hardly keep my mind on my work. At last I decided just to end the marriage contract with a quiet divorce. I loved her too much to make a public scene.

I couldn't talk to you. Or anyone, for that matter. I went to bed early and tried to sleep. Her words came to me over and over. "I've never cared for anyone but you.... I've never cared for anyone but you...." How I wished I could believe her!

I don't know when I finally fell asleep. Mom, I had a dream from God. An angel of the Lord came to me. His words pulsed through my mind so intensely I can remember them as if it were yesterday.

"Joseph, son of David," he thundered, "do not fear to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

I couldn't believe my ears, Mom. This was the answer! The angel continued, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

The angel gripped my shoulders with his huge hands. For a long moment his gaze

pierced deep within me. Just as he turned to go, I think I saw a smile on his shining face.

I sat bolt upright in bed. No sleep after that! I tossed about for a while, going over the words in my mind. Then I got up and dressed quietly so I wouldn't wake you.

I must have walked for miles beneath the moonless sky. Stars pricked the blackness like a thousand tiny pinpoints. A warm breeze blew on my face.

I sang to the Lord, Mom. Yes, me, singing, if you can imagine that. I couldn't contain my joy. I told Him that I would take Mary and care for her. I told Him I would watch over her--and the child--no matter what anyone said.

I got back just as the sun kissed the hilltops. I don't know if you still recall that morning, Mom. I can see it in my mind's eye as if it were yesterday. You were feeding the chickens, surprised to see me out. Remember?

"Sit down," I said to you. "I've got to tell you something." I took your arm and helped you find a seat on the big rock out back. "Mom," I said, "I'm going to bring Mary home as my wife. Can you help make a place for her things?"

You were silent a long time. "You do know what they're saying, don't you, son?" you said at last, your eyes glistening.

"Yes, Mom, I know."

Your voice started to rise. "If your father were still alive, he'd have some words, I'll tell you. Going about like that before you are married. Disgracing the family and all. You... you and Mary ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

You'd never have believed me if I'd tried to explain, so I didn't. Unless the angel had

spoken to you, you'd have laughed me to scorn.

"Mom, this is the right thing to do," I said.

And then I started talking to you as if I were the head of the house. "When she comes I don't want one word to her about it," I sputtered. "She's your daughter-in-law, you'll respect her. She'll need your help if she's to bear the neighbors' wagging tongues!"

I'm sorry, Mom. You didn't deserve that. You started to get up in a huff.

"Mom," I murmured, "I need you." You took my hand and got to your feet, but the fire was gone from your eyes.

"You can count on me, Joseph," you told me with a long hug. And you meant it. I never heard another word. No bride could hope for a better mother-in-law than you those next few months.

Mom, after I left you I went up the road to Mary's house and knocked. Her mother glared at me as she opened the door. Loudly, harshly she called into the house, "It's Joseph!" almost spitting out my name as she said it.

My little Mary came out cringing, as if she expected me give her the back of my hand, I suppose. Her eyes were red and puffy. I can just imagine what her parents had said.

We walked a few steps from the house. She looked so young and afraid. "Pack your things, Mary," I told her gently. "I'm taking you home to be my wife."

"Joseph!" She hugged me as tight as she could. Mom, I didn't realize she was so strong.

I told her what I'd been planning. "We'll go to Rabbi Ben-Ezer's house this week and have him perform the ceremony."

I know it was awfully sudden, Mom, but I figured the sooner we got married the better it would be for her, and me, and the baby.

"Mary, even if our friends don't come, at least you and I can pledge our love before God." I paused. "I think my Mom will be there. And maybe your friend Rebecca would come if her dad will let her. How about your parents?"

I could feel Mary's tiny frame shuddering as she sobbed quietly.

"Mary," I said. I could feel myself speaking more boldly. "No matter what anyone says about you, I'm proud you're going to be my wife. I'm going to take good care of you. I've promised God that."

She looked up.

I lowered my voice. "I had a dream last night, Mary. I saw an angel. I know."

The anguish which had gripped her face vanished. She was radiant as we turned away from the house and began to walk up the hill together.

Just then her mother ran out into the yard. "Wait," she called. She must have been listening from behind the door. Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"I'll get your father," she called, almost giddy with emotion. "We," she cried as she gathered up her skirts. "We," she shouted as she began to run to find her husband. "We ... are going to have a wedding!"

That's how it was, Mom. Thanks for being there for us. I'll write again soon.

Love,

Joseph